

The Evolution Of The Runway

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Anika Ljung

From the elegant streets of Paris to the eclectic city of Milan, fashion week has long been a place where timeless design and creative innovation intersect, and New York is no exception. This year, celebrities, buyers and fashion moguls alike gathered for the six-day event after a year-long hiatus following the coronavirus pandemic. Catwalks were placed outside, runways were live-streamed and invite-only shows proved highly selective. Perhaps the looming virus forced modernization in production, or maybe fashion week is trending away from traditional runway and towards new forms of collaborative presentation.

Since its introduction in the elegant Parisian ballrooms of the early-1900s, the catwalk has been the defining feature of fashion shows. Raised runways and elite front-row attendees delineate the traditional catwalk, a symbol of haute couture and exclusivity. More recently, the industry has been rattled by a migration towards more modern performative approaches, like Alexander McQueen's Spring/Summer 2001 production and Jean Paul Gaultier's Spring/Summer 2014 collection.

"Offering a new experience is refreshing, especially for those attending hundreds of shows," said Anneliese Koch, Marketing and Sales Manager for Markarian. At New York Fashion Week this year, the traditional catwalk often seemed superseded by detailed productions that seamlessly combined sales presentation with collaborative performance art.

At their fashion week debut, Markarian's six-person team worked alongside a production crew and event designer to create an immersive, intimate experience. Held on Sept. 10 in the Rainbow Room under a bright blue sky, tables covered in silk and donned with white flowers surrounded a circular rotating wooden platform that served as the models' catwalk.

Inspired by 1940s glam, guests sipped Tanqueray cocktails while Nancy Sinatra's cool ambience filled the golden room, encapsulating a glamorous and playful experience hosted in the sophisticated environment. A diverse group of models in pastel hues—complementary to the crystallized reflection of the window embellishments—strode down the platform, paying homage to the fashion shows that emerged in department stores in the early 1900s. Interactive, intimate, and quintessentially New York, Markarian transported guests to an era of high-fashion glamour while presenting a modernized collection of feminine silhouettes and ornate design.

Two days earlier—and with strikingly different conceptual execution—came the fashion week debut of Elena Velez, a Milwaukee-based brand. Held in an intimate Soho gallery, invitees were led into a small, curtain-shrouded space with shades of beige and white that capsulized the neutrality of Velez's intricate designs.

Textured, layered platforms stood in the center of the space set against a gray, paint-splattered floor that added to the cool aura of the gallery. Models in shades of white, cream, and pops of black stood static atop the platforms, their hair long and slick and their bodies limp. Though surrounded by a curious audience, the models eyes glazed over, creating an invisible boundary between art and consumer, as if they were immersed in another world. Fluorescent lights shone down as melodic electronic music added a level of futurism already felt by the models disengagement from the audience. "Being in that space with the layers of columns rather than a runway show felt very natural," said Isinsu Kuzalti, one of Velez's models. "It seemed like an extension of [Velez's] clothes."

An interdisciplinary exhibition, *Year Zero - Rinascita* employed the creative genius of set creation, interior design, nail art and metalwork to present a synergistic collection. Notable is the clothing's structure, combining traditionally feminine pieces with masculine elements of composition. Unfinished hems, plastered overalls and metal-hooked corsets point to an effeminate feel, providing a sense of architectural awareness and creating an illusion of consented bondage. An exploration of the duality of

enclosure, Velez drew upon brutalist framework to create a showroom space that further enhanced the intention in clothing design and artist collaboration.

In moving away from traditional runway and towards a more interactive experience, fashion designers are enhancing their creative vision through choices in set design, production and music. Through its exploration of interdisciplinary art, fashion is being taken to the next level of modernity, loyal to its traditions of collection and design, yet headed towards a future of intricate production that encapsulates the objective of fashion week as a leader in creative innovation.